

Carry On Regardless



By Annette Cairns

Have you ever wondered how performers bring their 'A' game every time?

Great music performances tap into the musicality and draw out emotions in the audience. Great actors help the audience believe that they are that character, immersed totally into the present. How do they do that? How do they remain present in the performance if there is a mistake or slip? How can they transport their audience in their emotions, time and space even if there is a slip?

Curiosity has led me to identify exemplars who regularly perform brilliantly, to model their excellence and to uncover what is it that they do to carry on.

I am the principal cornet in two brass bands (the equivalent of the lead violinist in an orchestra). This means I get to play solos, and this is where the ability to 'carry on regardless' becomes important. How can I maintain my performance whatever happens? Whatever blips occur? What model can I follow to ensure my performance is consistently of the standard I know I can play it to and to avoid being distracted by any mistakes? How can I maintain state?

And how do we do this in life?

Consistency: The ability to maintain state, whatever happens...

Outcomes for using this model

How will you know when you have achieved this?

- Every performance is as good as it can be.
- You believe that you have 'done enough'.
- You are immersed in the performance and totally present throughout.
- You know you can trust the process regardless of any mistakes.
- You will be able to carry on when mistakes occur as if they hadn't.
- You have self-belief that the performance is good.

Finding the model

I met with four exemplars. Two are actors, two are from top section brass bands. The similarities that emerged throughout the discussions were:



- They all had a clear outcome of a successful performance. They wanted to tap into the emotions and provide a transformative experience which would allow the audience to be transported into a different place for a moment in time.
- They were able to disassociate from previous rehearsals and focus entirely on the performance they were about to give. The focus that they then gave to the performance and remaining in the present meant they were able to move on straight away if a mistake occurred. In fact, they were able to tell me of times when they could not remember what had happened during the performance by the time they came off stage.
- They trusted the process and no longer thought about the mechanics of the performance, knowing that they had practised as much as they could prior to being here and nothing could change that. They all knew themselves capable of playing the piece or performing the role.
- They used positive self-talk before the performance to reinforce their belief or were encouraged by their conductors that all would be good. This meant that they also trusted and believed that they had the support of their colleagues.
- They used the relationship they had with the audience to give them focus. The two brass band exemplars spoke of contests where they knew that the audience included adjudicators who were judging them on their playing. These were occasions when mistakes could be costly but could be forgiven if the performance was good. Both the actors knew that the audience were paying for a good performance and deserved a good performance.

Beliefs of excellence in the model

- The meaning of the performance is the effect on the audience.
- You have all the resources to deliver that meaning to the audience.
- There is no failure. Every mistake is an opportunity to learn and grow.
- All the hard work has been done before this performance. What will be will be.
- If we can recognise excellence in a performance, we hold that structure within ourselves.
- If you have done it once, you can do it again.

The steps

- 1 You are about to give a performance. Consider the intention you wish to have for the audience. What do you wish to hear, see and feel from them? (Aec, Vec, Kic) What emotions are you wishing to invoke? (Kec) These intentions provide the purpose for your performance.
- 2 Consider the effect of the performance you wish to have on yourself. What do you wish to hear, see and feel? (Aec, Vec, Kec) This is your motivation.
- 3 You are 'The Performer'. You know your part and have practised it to perfection. Take a moment to reflect on the last great performance you did. Bring it into sharp focus. (Ver) Hear all the sounds. (Aer) Remember the feelings and emotions. (Kir) That memory of the sounds or images or feelings will fuel your self-belief as you step onto the stage.
- 4 As you are about to go to the 'stage', hear positive messages. (Aid) Hear them. Notice your body as you say, "I can do this." (Aid, Ki) And as you do this, notice your shoulders are back. (Ke) You are standing taller. Your breathing is regular. Maintain the positive self-talk. (Aid) You can do this. Whatever happens will be okay.
- 5 As you step onto the stage, let the images / sounds / feelings of rehearsals and previous performances go. That was then. Imagine leaving them in the wings. You are now in the present. You no longer require that reminder. You are ready. (Aid)
- 6 Become the performance. (Vi, Ki, Ai) Hear, see the first note / word. (Ai, Ve) Relax into the music or words. And as you do that, the audience fades into the background. Other sounds disappear into a gentle murmur. Focus entirely on the performance. The performance is everything. The performance is you.
- 7 As you perform, relax into the present. (Ki) Maintain focus. (Ve) If a mistake occurs, let go of it immediately and move onto the next note / word. The mistakes are an insignificant part of the performance. (Aid) Your purpose here is the whole performance and the transforming of the emotions in the audience. Carry on regardless. (Aid) Maintain focus onto the next note / word.
- 8 Do it all again next time!

Coding

- V: Visual
- A: Auditory
- K: Kinaesthetic
- I: Internal
- E: External
- C: Construct (imagined)
- R: Remembered
- D: Digital (e.g. AID Self-talk)

► **Does it work?**

I first used the model for *The Last Post* on Remembrance Sunday. As I stood poised to play, I reflected on my purpose for doing it: to provide a connection of the emotions invoked on hearing the music to the memory of those who have given their lives. As I reflected, I knew that I owed it to that purpose to play exceptionally. I immersed myself in the notes and the emotions that brought the music to life. I hit every single note perfectly.

Since then, during other performances, I have found the same thing to happen. If I can change the internal dialogue to 'focus' and 'move on', my playing improves. Focusing and relaxing into the music enables me to become immersed in the music once more. Knowing the reason and intention behind playing helps provide that focus.

In NLP, as we do one thing is how we do everything. I realised that this model can be used by me for any 'performance' and in life; for example, my 'performance' as a trainer, or when we face difficult situations that could go wrong.

I have used it during several training events where I was nervous. It has provided me with great learning.

If you are about to give a 'performance', whether it be music, a presentation, a courageous conversation, anything... use this model and it will work for you too

Teaching the model to others and the feedback from them

To further test the model, I used it with three people. This was to test out the terminology and wording and to see if the model helped them in their performances. And it did!

One of my NLP colleagues used the model with her daughter, Neve, who was nervous about her performance in an Irish dancing

"I could feel my confidence growing as we went through the model. I could absolutely do it!"

"I was able to hold onto the anchor and stay in a really good place."

routine. She performed it better than she ever had. Here is what she wrote:

"I am often quite anxious when taking on a performance in front of crowds. I see myself using this model in the near future for performances. My intention is to wow my audience and please myself in the process. I want my audience to recognise my unique footwork. I wish them to feel surprised and in awe. I wish for them to hear my strong taps and soft music.

"I want for myself to feel lively; I want to surprise myself. I want myself to be confident. I want to see and hear higher kicks, bigger jumps and louder taps than ever before. I wish to see my audience's entire focus to be on me.

"By the end of my performance I want to hear cheers. I want my team and my parents to be proud of me and to be impressed by me. I really want to be surprised in myself and to feel that I had an influence on the audience. I want my audience to become interested in the art of Irish dance.

"Looking back on my last time trying the model, I see myself in a third person view, looking out to a blurred audience. The image is dark at first but lightens up once I start performing. Throughout the model I found myself gaining confidence in my next performance.

"I can see myself using this model to get over stage-fright and enjoy my next performance."

The model was adjusted to take into account the feedback from them, which resulted in simplifying the model as one of the steps was repetitive and took the user away from their positive state.

The feedback also made the words more neutral, moving away from playing music – which makes the model more relevant to any performance, whether it is presentations, solos or acting.

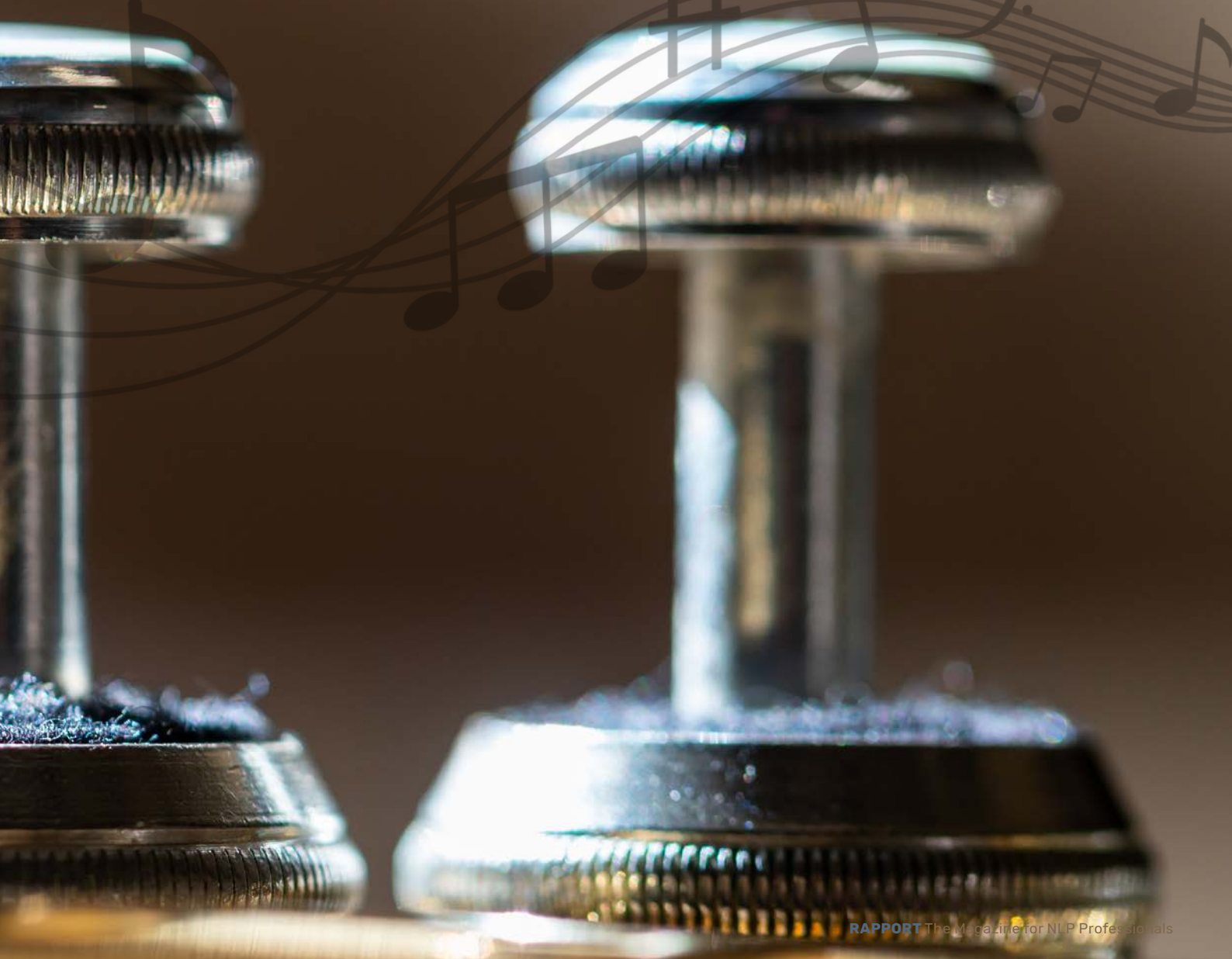
I also sent the model to another cornet player who went through it as he was about to play a difficult piece. He said, "I could feel my whole focus on the musicality and the emotions of the performance. Everything else faded away."

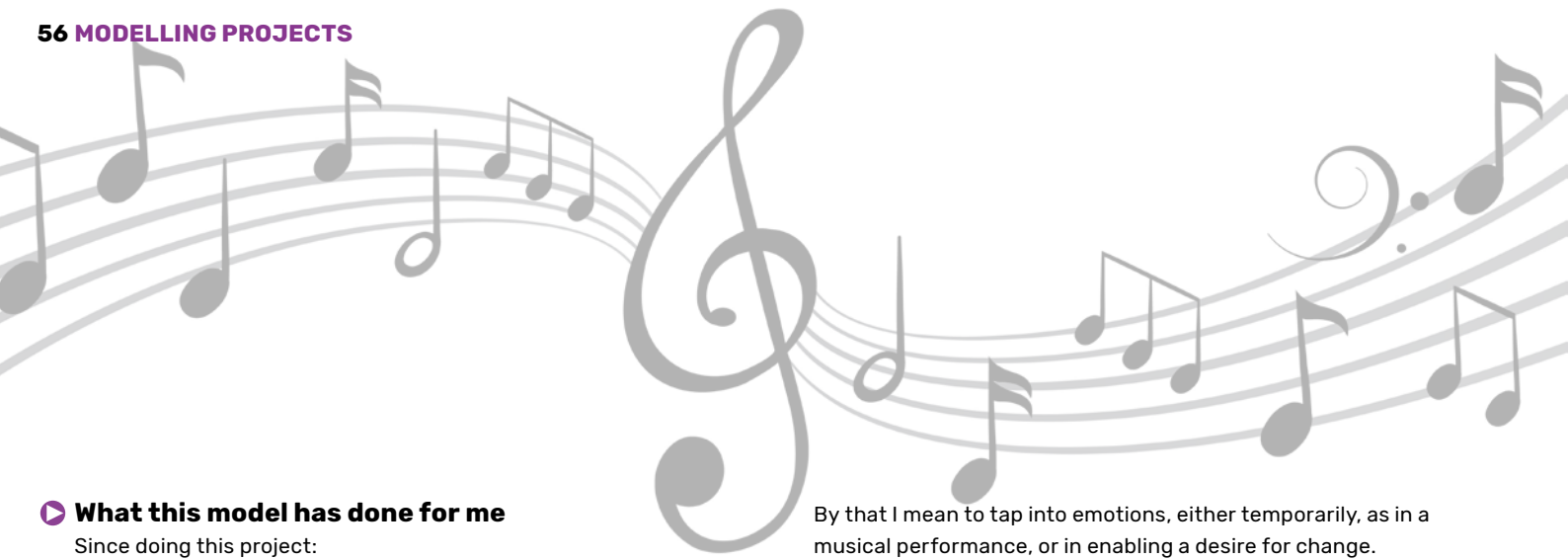


"I was holding on to what I wanted, not what I didn't!"

"I walked forward with the belief that I have this and whatever happens will be okay."

"I can picture exactly what will be."





▶ What this model has done for me

Since doing this project:

- Undertaking this modelling project was initially to help me overcome mistakes in my playing. It turned into something far more. It has thrown light on how I am and will be in other areas of my life, including as a trainer, coach and facilitator.
- I can now recognise negative self-talk and change it to positive self-talk.
- When someone asked me why I play in the band and ask for solos, the question generated reflections on the neurological levels. I know my own values and beliefs.
- My identity goes beyond being Annette and into being a cornet player, a trainer, a coach, a facilitator of learning. And my purpose is to provide transformative experiences for others.

By that I mean to tap into emotions, either temporarily, as in a musical performance, or in enabling a desire for change.

- It resonated with me when Sue Knight said that to be self-conscious is to be self-indulgent. I can now accept my talents and share them with others consistently.
- I can now say "I am enough" and truly believe it.
- I have recognised that if I step up to who and what I am in order to align with my sense of purpose... that's where the magic happens.

My huge thanks to Sue Knight for her incredible support throughout my NLP journey, and to Chris Turner, Kevin Cherry, Mark Phillips and Victoria Pritchard for the time and insights they gave me for this project. ■



Annette Cairns is a facilitator, coach and trainer who was first introduced to NLP as a sales technique, which totally put her off it. She was reintroduced to it through Sue Knight's training last year and that transformed her opinion of it. Her work mainly enables managers to become the leaders they want to be and that their organisations need them to be. NLP is proving invaluable to her in her practice.